



BRINGING THE PEOPLE TO THE ARTS

EDUCATORS TRAVEL TO MEXICO FOR A MONTH-LONG CULTURAL ADVENTURE

THIS YEAR, THE TERESA LOZANO LONG INSTITUTE OF LATIN AMERICAN Studies, the College of Fine Arts, and the Performing Arts Center collaborated on an exciting Fulbright-Hays Group Project Abroad program that immersed teachers in the culture and artistic history of Mexico. The 28-day study seminar and curriculum development trip was created to expose middle and high school educators from multiple disciplines to a variety of artistic groups and institutions. Upon returning home, the teachers each created unique lesson plans based on different portions of the experience.

Teacher training and curriculum development have been a core mission of LLILAS Outreach in recent years. In 2004, Outreach Coordinator Natalie Arsenault led a Fulbright group of teachers to participate in a month-long seminar in Salvador, Brazil. The result was an enrichment experience for teachers and the subsequent creation of multiple curriculum units focusing on Brazilian history and culture. The success of the Brazil trip provided inspiration and impetus for the Mexico trip as an opportunity to further knowledge of the diversity of Mexico's cultural traditions.

Over 25 fine arts, language arts, and social studies teachers applied for 15 spots for Mexico. The group was led by LLILAS's Natalie Arsenault; Judith Rhedin, Assistant Director for Community Relations at the PAC; and Dr. Robert DeSimone, Professor of Music and Director of the Sarah and Ernest Butler Opera Center at UT. Dr. DeSimone put the impact of the program in a nutshell when he told the participants, "I want to welcome you to what will be a wonderful life (and possibly life-changing) experience."

Participants were required to complete a series of readings and to attend a predeparture orientation at LLILAS immediately prior to the trip, which included Spanish language classes, background sessions on Mexico and its performing arts, and requirements and expectations for the program. The participants also toured UT's Blanton Museum and Austin's Mexic-Arte.

A Whirlwind through Mexico

The adventure began June 18, 2006, in Oaxaca de Juárez City, where participants were introduced to one of the prominent cultures of southern Mexico and attended a reenactment of a traditional festival. In Mexico City, participants studied Mexican history, from precolonial times to modern, and were introduced to the Ballet Folklórico de México de Amalia Hernandez, a company that integrates Mexico's traditional dances from all historical periods into a cultural mosaic. Participants also had the honor of meeting cellist Carlos Prieto and learned about Mexican classical music, a subject explored in greater detail when they reached Morelia, home to the Conservatorio de las Rosas, one of Mexico's oldest and most important music schools. Next, the group journeyed to Mazatlán, home to the Delfos Contemporary Dance Company, recognized as one of the most important dance companies in Latin America. Here, the group explored Mexico's performing arts as they are inspired by and participate in international artistic dialogues. Finally, in Guadalajara, birthplace of mariachi, participants studied the music that has become synonymous with Mexico as well as the innovative way the city is focusing on performing arts and culture.

Sharing the Experience

Once they returned home, participants created lesson plans based on the seminar in Mexico to be shared with their peers at venues such as statewide educator conferences, district-wide professional development meetings, and individual school training. The plans were aligned to national teaching standards in fine arts, language arts, and social studies so that they would be readily usable in the secondary classroom. Lesson plans will be gathered into a comprehensive curriculum unit including multimedia resources (CDs, videos, and printed materials) provided by artists in Mexico. For these and past LLILAS Fulbright program lesson plans, see: <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/insts/llilas/outreach/fulbright/>.

By giving educators a firsthand experience with rich art and culture, the program hopes to generate excitement and learning back in the classroom. As Natalie Arsenault sums it up, "These programs aim to transform the curriculum as well as teachers' lives. By using the performing arts as an entry point into culture, we hope to integrate the arts into all courses—from English to world cultures to Texas history. We know that the teachers will bring their enthusiasm for Mexico, and for its wonderful performing arts, back to their students." 🌟

